PROPOSED BILL NO. 5149 AN ACT CONCERNING Sober Living Homes

Committee on Public Health

February 26, 2018

Good Morning Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Representative Steinberg, and esteemed members on the Committee of Public Health.

My name is Meagan McGuire, a registered in voter in New Britain who proudly exercises that vote.

I am here representing myself to speak on BILL NO, 5149 An Act Concerning Sober Living Homes. I am a grateful woman in recovery and, having lived in various sober living environments, I feel standards and a centralized list of credentialed houses are needed. I had the honor of testifying before the Public Health Committee regarding this topic last year and, while the facts of my experience have not changed, my recovery, understanding of the legislative process and knowledge of community resources have progressed. I have spoken to multiple stakeholders regarding Bill No 5149 and it is overwhelmingly obvious that everyone supports safe, affordable, discrete recovery housing yet the means to achieve that shared goal are elusive.

Among other professional roles, I am currently employed as a Recovery Support Specialist for DMHAS at Capitol Region Mental Health Center and I am here on personal time. In my current RSS role, what was my liability in active addiction is now my asset in recovery.

While I support the intention of the bill to provide oversight, centralized registration and perceived safety through Narcan availability, I have major concerns regarding DMHAS' ability to effectively execute such legislation in their

current financial crisis. In recent years, there have been grassroots, peer lead efforts amongst the recovery community and non-profits, to provide standards for sober living homes and mobilize a list of reputable sober living resources; those efforts were directly and negatively impacted by DMHAS budget cuts. The grassroots efforts have been difficult to navigate and there is no obvious, easily accessible to identify quality sober living homes. That being said, I do not believe, if the responsibility is deemed that of DMHAS, that the effort starts at scratch.

Massachusetts instituted legislation that has supported a growing and robust sober living community, in part because of their utilization of established, evidence-based standards and technical assistance provided by National Alliance of Recovery Residences. I recently spoke with the President of NARR, David Sheridan, who suggested an opportunity to bring statewide stakeholders together through a web-based platform for a facilitated conversation regarding implementation and support of building a safe, accountable structure for sober living homes.

Concerns regarding an individual's privacy of residence is easily avoided by not listing addresses. There is currently a difficult to access list published by Advanced Behavioral Health, who is contracted by DMHAS to oversee Supported Recovery House Services, which is a program of short term financial support to those early in recovery; beyond the city, there is no identification of the location of the house. I believe it should also be noted that Oxford House, which is a highly reputable, national system of sober houses, regularly publishes the addresses and phone number of the affiliated houses. Personally, the publication of an address and telephone number by the Delaware Oxford House system

provided a direct contact for sober living during a time of major crisis and confusion in my life.

Ultimately, when I testified last year, I was desperate for anyone to provide protection against the realities I experienced and know to be true in some sober living environments; today, I am asking for continued conversation and careful consideration of the verbiage regarding action to be taken. Please do not make mandates, as mandates innately exclude; incentivize and promote mutual buy-in that not only embodies protection and access, but also takes into consideration SAMSHAs four major dimensions that support a life in recovery: health, home, purpose and community. These four dimensions are innately found and can be developed by an individual in a safe, supportive sober housing environment.